

## Practicing design for particular places

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## Practicing design for particular places

*"It seems a commonplace that almost everyone is born with the need for identification with his surroundings and a relationship to them – with the need to be in a recognizable place. So sense of place is not a fine art extra, it is something we cannot afford to do without."--- Jan Nairn, 1965*

Since its first issue, SPOOL has used the term 'landscape metropolis' to address urban formations beyond the traditional city that – despite their increasing ubiquity - still lack in-depth attention from the perspective of aesthetic appreciation, designerly concepts of development, guidelines for planning and governance, and design theoretical apprehension. The prefix 'landscape' is used to describe attention to these topics through the lens of landscape architecture, and offers, we feel, some novel potentials: in considering the metropolis as a cultural phenomenon that is constructed mentally as well as physically and socially; which relies on human as well as on natural driving forces; and which contains, somewhere in the cracks of the mosaic, in the 'in-between', places with distinguishable qualities – particular places.

In an era of globalization, landscape architects and urban designers have learnt to think big in the landscape metropolis – in the large scale and with far-reaching visions. Yet this bigness is still largely the domain of international players, and its effects do not necessarily foster the quality of urban spaces in the landscape metropolis. And this is also the moment we observe tendencies to think small again: design interventions on the neighbourhood level, transformations of unused spaces through low-cost, bottom-up initiatives, centred on awareness-raising and community building and which shape space temporarily. In this new playing field, designers work more and more with that which exists, taking everything into consideration, including those scattered pieces of the metropolitan tissue that defy definition. If we look at them through the lens of landscape architecture, can we apprehend their qualities beyond the static lens of the architectural object, by reading them as dynamic landscape architectural forms? What is the nature of such places and what is the vocabulary to describe them? The papers in this issue provide tools to sharpen our view for the particular, to identify the places of the landscape metropolis in their structural, material, dynamic, practical, atmospheric, mnemonic and discursive identities. They tentatively propose a new terminology for places eluding conceptual description, using works and words for something we still hardly have a name for.

In the two issues of SPOOL's volume 3, designerly and discursive work on particular places of the landscape metropolis is explored much like a gold digger might do – by taking a closer look, spotting those grains that merit attention amongst the vast ore body that is the metropolitan territory. Once found, these grains evoke all kinds of questions: How to grasp the particularities of places—their aesthetic, social, atmospheric, relational, and dynamic qualities, which are always materialized in a physical situation that has a particular form, and makes up part of a bigger picture? How to enhance identified particularities in a designerly way? How to theorize understandings of place for the landscape metropolis? How to replace tacitly accepted ideas of beauty when identifying a diversity of beauties in places so far overlooked?

The papers of these two issues on particular places do not provide a grand narrative. The authors published here accept the complexity of our take on the landscape metropolis, and put forward scattered narratives that emerge from the very interstices of the grand narratives, and of the many practices of research in and for the landscape metropolis. Authors have sent us proposals for theorizing and methodizing approaches to place and landscape metropolitan qualities, which we have grouped in the first issue under the title

'Capturing Particularities in the Landscape Metropolis'. Other submissions reflect on design work, sometimes imagined, sometimes realized, and sometimes also carried out by or in collaboration with the authors. This group of papers is collected in the second issue, entitled 'Practicing Design for Particular Places'.

Practicing in the landscape metropolis today means one hops from bike to train to car and creates links between fragments of the landscape metropolis, in ever changing moves. This is what we observe our authors doing through their research. To capture particularities, they move from on-site experience to off-site representation (Farsø and Henriksson), from physical fieldwork to digitally expanded mapping (Hemmersam and Morrison), from theorizing atmosphere to experimenting with cartography (Spanou), from walking to knowing (Schultz), from appreciating the urban to defining its quietness (Nielsen), from theories of frame to design as framing (Alexandrescu). To suggest and reflect practices of design for particular places, our authors examine narrative approaches (Havik and van Haeren), dynamic readings (Prezelj), durational art strategies (Tihanyi), participatory practices (Siarheyeva), DIY aesthetics (Dahl), and the staging of atmospheric encounters (Labadini).

Research about particular places can hardly be imagined without reference to such places, and unsurprisingly, all our authors start to develop their thoughts from a specific location, which offers us a picture of its own right of what the 'landscape metropolis' might include: the Öresund region across Denmark and Sweden (Farsø and Henriksson), a couple of Arctic cities in Norway, Russia and Canada (Hemmersam and Morrison), the Spanish region of Catalonia (Spanou), the German city of Freiburg (Schultz), newly developed districts in Amsterdam and Copenhagen (Nielsen), the transformed centre of Bukarest (Alexandrescu), urban fringes in the Netherlands (Havik and van Haeren), a contaminated site in the outskirts of Paris (Prezelj), a central district of Budapest (Tihanyi), harbour sites in Marseille (Siarheyeva) and Gothenburg (Dahl), a seafront in the Norwegian city of Brattøra (Labadini).

Practitioners of the landscape metropolis shift attention from people on the sidewalk to a smartphone message to a shower from a sudden cloud. This is how our authors unfold their thinking about particular places, and that is how we invite our readers to practice these two issues of SPOOL – with attention to the particular, while establishing links between one particularity and another, and to the overarching whole. Place is specific, 'somewhere'. Specific places can make connections between what is local and particular and what is regional and worldwide, as the Canadian geographer Edward Relph wrote in his study on the concept of place entitled *Place and Placelessness* (2009). He described place as the intimate and specific basis for how each of us connects with the world, with the potential to serve as a pragmatic foundation for addressing profound local and global challenges that are emerging in the present – be it megacity growth, climate change or economic disparity. Rethinking the particular, we argue, is urgently needed to bring affect back into our design and research endeavours. Or, as American scholar Elizabeth Meyer suggested on a recent conference in Malmö, 'what if landscape design techniques (...) were recalibrated so that open-endedness included the uncertain affective capacities and propensities of human emotional interactions with designed landscapes that evoked awe? In doing so, might they challenge our sense of the public, and in doing so, suggest new modes of being in the world?'

*Saskia de Wit and Lisa Diedrich*